

Chairman Jore and Members of the committee, my name is Terri Middagh, I reside in Helena and began teaching at Bryant School in 1996. I spent the first four years as a Special Education Teacher, followed by four years as a half-day Kindergarten and Reading Recovery Teacher, and most recently, three years in the Full Time Kindergarten Program at our school. After having the opportunity to experience both Kindergarten models, I am a proponent of Senate Bill 123, Full Time Kindergarten, for several reasons.

In the fall of 2003 Bryant School staff decided to implement a Full Time Kindergarten model based on two factors. The first, Kindergarten students were entering the school setting without the basic academic, behavioral and social skills necessary to be successful. Second, the half-day model did not allow enough time to develop all of those areas. Therefore, the priority was to teach academic skills at the expense of the development of the "whole child."

The rewards of the Full Time Kindergarten program have been positive in all respects for Bryant students. Three successes were obvious in the first year. First and foremost, multiple transitions and childcare were no longer issues for parents, which increased attendance dramatically, providing students with the opportunity to learn.

Second, increased time in a Full Time Kindergarten program allowed for individualized and self-directed student activities. It also increased opportunities for teacher observations, assessments, and effective interventions, which helped increase student success. The Kindergarten student's academic scores and readiness skills have increased in all areas.

And lastly, this increased time allows students with more opportunities to observe and role-play appropriate behavioral and social skills, which increase academic success and are critical for a successful life outside the classroom. All of these accomplishments have lead to a decrease in remedial programs, a decrease in behavioral problems, and a decrease in special education referrals at our school.

The most frequent opposition I hear to full time kindergarten programs is five and six year-old children should play, not sit at a desk all day. The increased time in the day has allowed for those types of playful learning opportunities for our students. For example, we have tripled the number of neighborhood field trips. Students have regularly scheduled physical education, music, computer and library time. They meet with their 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Big Buddies at least two to three times a month to develop relationships with older students, who in turn teach them to play games, read stories, or help them complete more complex art projects than could be accomplished on their own. Student centers that contain a variety of manipulatives help students learn academic material in the classrooms in the non-traditional manner. For example, students learn to write their names and words using shaving cream, paint, sand, play dough, markers, magnetic letters, crayons, sidewalk chalk, skipping, singing, chanting, you get the point. Play is not missing in a developmentally appropriate program. These types of activities develop a whole child, not a First Grader in Kindergarten. My students are eager learners, happy to be in school, and have a balanced learning approach that meets their developmental needs in the full time model.

In order to be fair, I will share the two most frequent complaints from my students and parents. One, students report dismay at not being able to write a story in their journal every day. Two, parents are concerned with the number of books that their child is<sup>are</sup> bringing home to read each night. They are at a loss for words when I report, "Your child gets to decide how many books they want to take home to read to you, I decide which are at their reading level."

To conclude, recent brain and learning research shows that the critical time or development years for laying the foundation of neural connections, which determines learning success occurs between birth and age eight. Dr. Michael Phelps, who co-invented the brain-imaging technique called the PET scan, said, "The development years are not just a chance to educate, they're actually your obligation to form a brain and if you miss these opportunities then, you've missed them—forever." Let us not miss one more opportunity in Montana.